
IT'S FIVE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ANSWER TO GIVE EVERY KID HOPE PERSONAL

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It's Personal: Five Questions You Should Answer to Give Every Kid Hope
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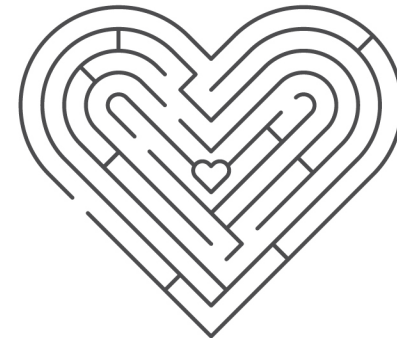
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IT'S

FIVE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD
ANSWER TO GIVE EVERY KID HOPE

PERSONAL



*“Love recognizes no barriers.
It jumps hurdles, leaps fences,
penetrates walls to arrive “
at its destination full of hope.”*

MAYA ANGELOU

IT'S PERSONAL



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CHAPTER 1

IT'S PERSONAL

STOP BEING SO SHALLOW

Chances are if you're reading this book, someone has asked you to become intentional about investing in the life of a few kids or teenagers. If someone else hasn't asked you yet, well, then we're asking you now.

You have officially been invited to invite yourself into someone's personal life.

Have you ever wondered how that works?

"Hello, my name is Jon. I volunteer here, so now let's start having deep, meaningful conversations." That's a little creepy. Maybe instead it just starts with remembering a name . . . and it ends with them moving into your living room. Don't worry, that almost never happens.

A few years ago, we set out to inspire leaders to get more personal in the way they approach the discipleship of the next generation.

We spent a year interviewing volunteers and discovering the pitfalls and best practices for those who work with kids and teenagers. The result of that project was a book called *Lead Small* where we outline the five roles of what we call a small group leader. A small group leader is anyone who shows up consistently in the lives of a few kids or teenagers to:

1. **BE PRESENT**
2. **CREATE A SAFE PLACE**
3. **PARTNER WITH PARENTS**
4. **MAKE IT PERSONAL**
5. **MOVE THEM OUT**

These five roles are still the heart of what we believe it looks like to help a young person develop authentic faith. The overwhelmingly positive response to *Lead Small* is evidence that more and more leaders have a desire to approach ministry in a way that's relational. But the five roles of a small group leader are like any list. They make a few implied assumptions. If you want to show up for kids and teenagers in a way that matters, there's at least one additional life skill you may need to figure out. Like, how to pack your own overnight bag for a retreat. Well, that and how to be personal.

In fact, we're going to get really personal for a minute. **It's possible to lead a small group and still miss the entire point.** In every profession that involves working with kids and teenagers, you will find books, speeches, lectures, and articles on how fulfilling that profession can be. We often recruit volunteers by making emotional promises. We guarantee that showing up consistently for kids and teenagers will awaken you to experience life more fully. You will suddenly feel content and purposeful. Your life will have meaning.

You will probably
laugh more,
feel more,
love more,
and wake up most mornings feeling like a hero.

Part of that is true or at least possible. But you might also wake up some mornings frustrated you have more events on your calendar, emails in your inbox, and distractions to your week. We know because we've actually done it. When this happens, leading kids starts to feel a little like one more responsibility for you to juggle. You might even find yourself thinking, "You guys know I'm not getting paid to do this, right?"

The ideas in this book are about the difference between being a fulfilled leader or a frustrated volunteer. Actually, the ideas in this book may be the essence of what it means to live a courageous, meaningful, and fulfilling life in any arena. But before we get carried away, let's talk about an approach many of us have when it comes to life and relationships.

Somewhere around middle school, most people begin to develop some coping mechanisms for dealing with rejection and disappointment. If you're honest, you have probably learned how to discern what is expected of you in certain environments and developed some image management skills. Many of us encounter hurt or grief, and we practice new defensive strategies of our own invention.

It's as if we drift into an unspoken philosophy of living. There's no author of this philosophy, yet millions of people follow the path. For now, let's call it The Shallow Way.

NOW HEAR US OUT.
SHALLOW HAS SOME INCREDIBLE BENEFITS.

A little bit of shallow allows you to smile politely, make small talk, and carry on with your day. It's the only way you can manage to spill hot coffee on your lap when you almost wreck the car because you were shouting at a family member, and then walk into work to make that presentation you rehearsed. Sometimes shallow is necessary.

Shallow might also be the reason you throw a little filter on that photo before you post it. Or the reason you move aside the pile

of dirty laundry so it's out of frame. And you know what? It made for a good-looking photo. It's okay to enjoy a shallow version of people, including ourselves. Sometimes shallow is nice.

Over time, though, you can become a little too good at living a shallow life. You begin to act as if very little is worth your time. You convince yourself, "I wouldn't be able to 'fix it,' so why try?" You have a hard time caring about things you know you ought to care about. You choose comfort over risk, and certainty over curiosity.

**SHALLOW IN SMALL AMOUNTS CAN PROVIDE RELIEF.
BUT SHALLOW ALL THE TIME CAN LEAVE US EMPTY.**

**SHALLOW IN SOME RELATIONSHIPS JUST MAKES US POLITE.
BUT SHALLOW IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP CAN MAKE US LONELY.**

It's okay to be shallow. It's just not okay to always be shallow. Most of us know that if we live too shallow for too long, we will eventually fall apart. The same is true for kids and teenagers. If they grow up with a shallow approach to life, they are likely to self-destruct as they enter adulthood. Isn't it interesting that the very construct we use to protect ourselves and hold it all together is ultimately the thing that can undo us?

**A SHALLOW APPROACH TO LIFE CAN ROB LEADERS OF THEIR
POTENTIAL TO GIVE A KID OR TEENAGER HOPE.**

Young people need to grow up knowing they were made in the image of God and loved by Jesus so they can love others. But they may never understand what that looks like in action unless they have a few adults who demonstrate what it means to move beyond The Shallow Way.

So, let's talk about what we mean by shallow. Metaphorically speaking, isn't it simply the opposite of deeper? Certainly. But what does deeper really look like in action?

Recently Reggie and I (Kristen) were speaking at an event in

Northern California and had an opportunity to go to lunch with some of the staff for the event. At the table, someone started a conversation about the characteristic differences between Northern Cal and Southern Cal. They talked about how Los Angeles was for the fashionable, superficial, popular crowd. Things were different in the location where this group lived (essentially, women wore less makeup).

The conversation bounced around the differences until one leader made a witty and insightful remark, "Yeah, in Southern California they're so shallow. They judge you on your appearance. Here we only judge you on your academic achievement." We all laughed. They were right. Masks come in all shapes and sizes, and we are often tempted to correct the shallowness we observe in someone else simply by applying a different shallow mask to ourselves.

Religion has been a friend of The Shallow Way for thousands of years. In church circles, we like to counterbalance the shallowness of culture by claiming we are deeper. But deeper how?

Deeper in our understanding of theology?
Deeper in our spiritual practice?
Deeper in our knowledge of Greek architecture?

In the church, we have a way of making deeper just another version of shallow in disguise. So, what if we need a less ambiguous term for deeper living? What if a clearer alternative to The Shallow Way is learning to be personal?

Think about it.

**SHALLOW IS FAST.
PERSONAL TAKES TIME.**

**SHALLOW IS EASY.
PERSONAL IS COMPLICATED.**

**SHALLOW IS SAFE.
PERSONAL IS RISKY.**

**SHALLOW IS CERTAIN.
PERSONAL IS UNRESOLVED.**

**SHALLOW IS DISMISSIVE.
PERSONAL IS INTERESTED.**

**SHALLOW IS FAMILIAR.
PERSONAL IS UNPREDICTABLE.**

**SHALLOW COSTS MONEY.
PERSONAL COSTS ME.**

You don't typically have to work at being shallow. But you do have to work at being personal. That's why one of the best things any adult can possibly do is begin to show up consistently in the life of a kid or teenager and be personal.

I (Virginia) am the product of an African American urban church that loved young people. The pastor and leadership team prioritized youth. They saw the church as more than programming. While I was still a young person, the church gave me my first opportunities to lead. They saw something in me the surrounding culture and education system failed to see.

These opportunities were the catalyst I needed to recognize the potential I may have never seen in myself. My greatest memories are conversations with adults who took the time to really know me. They chose to be personally involved in my life, and in doing so they provided a positive voice of hope.

In other environments I was unseen, but at church I was seen. In other places I was overlooked, but the youth leaders saw who I could become. Looking back, I am convinced those leaders nurtured me because they made it personal.

They honored my personal worth.
They respected my personal voice.
They invested in my personal dreams.

That's what happens when you choose to be personal. All three of us have discovered that as Christian leaders, it's imperative for us to develop authentic relationships and to get closer to the frontlines where kids are hurting.

The result of shallow ministry is disillusionment.
The result of personal ministry is hope.

That's why Jesus showed up in a religiously impersonal culture. He wanted to establish a stark contrast between a personal God and any version of God that portrayed Him as indifferent and disinterested.

**JESUS WAS PERSONAL.
HE TOUCHED PEOPLE WHO HAD DISEASES.
HE SPOKE RESPECTFULLY TO A SCANDALOUS WOMAN.
HE WEPT AT THE TOMB OF A FRIEND.
HE BROKE A RULE TO GET SOMEONE OUT OF TROUBLE.
HE MET LEADERS PRIVATELY, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.
HE WASHED THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES.
HE INVITED HIMSELF TO A WILD PARTY.
HE PLAYED WITH TODDLERS.**

WHY?

**BECAUSE JESUS DIDN'T SEE HUMANS THE WAY
THE AVERAGE HUMAN SEES HUMANS.**

Jesus . . .
honored those who were disgraced.
befriended those who were marginalized.
embraced those who were rejected.
forgave those who were shunned.
believed in those who were broken.

That kind of sounds like the opposite of shallow living, doesn't it? **Jesus never got so busy trying to save everyone that He didn't stop to help someone.**

The Gospel according to Luke records a well-known story of a wealthy tax collector who had a reputation for cheating people out of their money.¹ One day, the notorious businessman heard that Jesus was passing through his town.

In an attempt to get a glimpse of the famous rabbi, Zacchaeus sprinted ahead of the crowd and scrambled up a tree. It just so happened that when Jesus spotted the man, He stopped and called him out by name in front of everyone. What Jesus did next shocked the entire community. He invited Himself to the tax collector's home to stay the night. Criticism and rumors began to circulate throughout the town.

Why would Jesus show favor to someone like Zacchaeus? How could Jesus not care what this man had done to so many families? What good could come from spending time with the most dishonest man in the community? It was clear when Zacchaeus climbed down from the sycamore tree that no one in the crowd saw him the way Jesus did.

The crowd saw a man who was driven by personal greed.
The crowd saw an individual who would use anybody to get ahead.
The crowd saw someone who had hurt their community.

But not Jesus.
He saw a man with intrinsic worth.
He saw an individual who reflected God's image.
He saw someone with extraordinary potential.

Jesus never let public opinion change the way He saw anyone.

Maybe Jesus chose Zacchaeus in front of everyone to prove what can happen when anyone is treated like someone God loves. Think about this: The way Jesus saw Zacchaeus ultimately changed the way everyone saw Zacchaeus. Better yet, the way Jesus saw Zacchaeus changed the way Zacchaeus saw himself.

Something remarkable happens when you start seeing people

¹ Luke 19:1-10

the way Jesus sees them. No one imagined how Jesus' personal interaction with one man would change their entire town. But it did. Zacchaeus changed so much that Jesus said, "Today, salvation has come to your house."

JESUS IMPLIED THAT SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED IN THE IMMEDIATE MOMENT OF ZACCHAEUS' LIFE THAT WOULD TRANSFORM EVERY MOMENT OF HIS FUTURE. THAT'S THE EFFECT AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS HAS IN SOMEONE'S LIFE.

It's as if He were saying, "You were living an empty, lonely, shallow existence. Now that I'm here, you can start living with a different kind of hope."

We need to remember that the Gospel is personal. If we take our cue from Jesus, we will stop limiting the good news to only what happens after someone dies. It's possible for a personal encounter with Jesus to impact someone's life while they are living. At the end of the Zacchaeus story, Jesus reminds everyone of His mission, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."² Some scholars even speculate this is the summative statement for the entire book of Luke.

Zacchaeus had lost his sense of identity
until Jesus called him by name and said, "Come down out of that tree."

Zacchaeus had lost his sense of belonging
until Jesus said, "I'm coming to your house. Let's spend some time together."

Zacchaeus had lost his sense of purpose
until Jesus saw him in a different way than the crowd had seen him.

Then Zacchaeus had **HOPE**.

Don't miss this.

² Luke 19:10

WHAT JESUS DID FOR ZACCHAEUS WAS PERSONAL.

He pulled Zacchaeus out of the crowd so He could spend time with him individually. Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem to save the world, but He stopped on the way to the cross to save one person and remind the rest of us that the mission is personal.

Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is such a powerful example of what it means to be personal we will continue to refer to it throughout this book. But we don't want you to miss the main point:

The church needs more leaders to learn how to be personal because too many kids feel invisible or ignored.

There is an epidemic rise in bullying, emotional abuse, depression, self-harm, and suicide among kids and teenagers.³

If we think these issues are going to be resolved by deeper worship songs, deeper Bible studies, or deeper theological debates, then we are actually shallow in our thinking.

It's more important now than ever before to redefine what it means to be deep, and invite a generation of leaders to be more personal.

Remember, the gravitational pull for all of us will always be toward the shallow. We can easily convince ourselves of the need to add followers, build a platform, or teach a lesson, but none of those things matter if we fail to be personal.

³ You don't have to go far to find the latest data on these trends, but to get started, look up the the YouthTruth report on bullying from Hechinger, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports on youth suicide and self-harm, and the Pew Research Center's Social and Demographic Trends.

STOP AND LOOK AROUND.

THERE'S SOMEONE WHO NEEDS YOU TO SEE THEM.

If you look closely, there's a kid who has pushed their way past the crowd into a space where they hope you will notice them. There's a kid who needs someone to see them.

They need you to see the everyday world that is defining them. They need you to see the private doubts that are paralyzing them. They need you to see the potential future that is waiting for them.

If you want to move beyond The Shallow Way you may have to become a little more personal.

Think about what Jesus did for Zacchaeus. Jesus identified Zacchaeus in way that communicated value. Jesus instinctively addressed what mattered to Zacchaeus. Jesus took the time to enter into Zacchaeus' everyday world. Jesus responded to Zacchaeus in a way that removed his shame. Jesus believed in Zacchaeus' potential to do good.

What if you could do the same for a kid or teenager?

THAT'S WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT.

IT'S A CALL FOR ALL OF US TO . . .

**IDENTIFY SOMEONE IN A WAY THAT COMMUNICATES VALUE.
DISCOVER WHAT MATTERS TO SOMEONE TO PROVE THEY MATTER.
TAKE THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND SOMEONE'S EVERYDAY CONTEXT.
RESPOND TO SOMEONE IN A WAY THAT REPLACES SHAME WITH HOPE.
BELIEVE IN SOMEONE'S POTENTIAL TO LIVE A REMARKABLE STORY.**

The point is, if you want to be a transformational leader, then it has to be personal. If you want to anchor a kid's faith to something that lasts, then it has to be personal. If you want to offer hope in a world of hopelessness, then it has to be personal.